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SUBJECT: JORDAN MEDIA REACTION TO POTUS ARABIYA INTERVIEW

11. SUMMARY: The President's interview with Al-Arabiya was broadcast and rebroadcast in Jordan hourly on January 27. Online news outlets reported highlights the same day, while major print outlets gave it front-page attention in January 28 editions. Op-ed commentary was limited, but cautiously positive. END SUMMARY.

12. The President's interview on January 26 with Hisham Melhem of the pan-Arab satellite television channel Al-Arabiya was broadcast and rebroadcast to viewers in Jordan hourly and in full the following day, January 27. Online news outlets posted highlights of the interview beginning that same day. Major print outlets gave the interview front-page notice in their January 28 editions. Some newspapers combined excerpts of the interview with Secretary Clinton's remarks of January 27 and news of Senator Mitchell's visit to the region.

13. All but one major broadsheet ran front-page reports on the Arabiya interview. Reports relied heavily on international wire service accounts and the channel's own report. Reports focused on the President's remarks in connection with peace-making efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. Al-Ghad published its front-page report under the headline "Obama: I Will Not Wait Until the End of My Term in Office to Consider Peace." In its front-page story, Al-Rai quoted the President as saying "America has made mistakes, but is not the enemy of Muslims." Al-Arab Al-Yawm's report appeared under the headline "Mitchell Starts with Meeting Mubarak; Obama Encourages Speeding Up Efforts to Restore Peace Process." The Jordan Times' account included views of analysts in the region who described the decision to interview first with an Arabic news network as "stunning."

14. All reports highlighted the President's determination to engage in peace efforts immediately, and on his several of his specific remarks, including "Americans are not your enemy," "We sometimes make mistakes," and "It is important for us to be willing to talk to Iran."

15. Jordan's leading online news outlet Ammoun News carried the text of Arabiya's web report on the interview. Local readers' comments, twelve in total, ranged from absolute pessimism to unqualified optimism, with many positively inclined. One commentator described the President's words as "sweet talk" and urged Arabs to "wait and see," another strongly criticized him and called on Arabs "to defend their lands and their people." Four comments were distinctly positive. One described the President as a man "with a clean mentality, humanitarian and humble, who will give America its respect back." Another saw "a great opportunity... to break the monopoly on relations" between Israel, America and Europe." A third commentator said, "If Obama's intentions are good, then yes and yes" for new relations. The fourth called on Arabs to offer support because "it has been a long time since we heard such talk from an American president." Other locally-based online news outlets carried highlights of the interview, including Aaram, Jorday, Sawsana, and Mustaqba.

16. Editorial Commentary

-- "A Good Promise From Obama And A Bad Promise From Israel!"

Columnist Jamil Nimri in the January 28 edition of the independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad comments, "Al-Arabiya TV achieved an exceptional journalistic precedent with its interview of President Barack Obama. It is no coincidence that Obama chose an Arabic channel to conduct his first television interview with a foreign station. He certainly has hundreds of requests for interviews from foreign television channels, but he gave priority to address the Arab and Muslim world, which was also given a message of friendship during the inaugural speech. Obama's words stirred reactions of assurance in the region. Although there was nothing new and specific in the interview, the significance was in the completely different language and spirit. The military language has completely disappeared, and so did the hostile expressions; he barely used the word terrorism in his remarks except in answers to questions about that issue.... The man's cultural and intellectual roots are apparent in his radically different rhetoric from Bush's.... The language of force, conceit and threat has totally disappeared. We can see that this man, who came along after having struggled for civil rights, equality, and justice, has an utterly different idea from his predecessor about the 'other.' After all, he himself was the 'other' who fought for rights and equality. When he spoke about the Palestinians and the Israelis, he used a balanced language towards both of them, of course reiterating America's absolute commitment to Israel's security, but he did not give any descriptions for organizations in the region, like Hamas or Hizbollah, as the previous administration used to do in every occasion, calling them terrorists and threatening them. With every new American president, we have become accustomed to having to wait months until the administration studies the Palestinian issue and becomes seriously engaged in it. Although the economic issue was to be, by consensus agreement, the priority for the Obama administration, we saw him dispatch George Mitchell to the region on

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the very second day of entering the White House.... Therefore, we can expect that the old failing path, including the Annapolis path, will be overcome towards building a different and hard to predict vision, but probably more serious and honest.... We can expect a new wind to blow over the region. Yes, there is something that replenishes hopes, although a bad promise is pushing in the opposite direction from Israel. Opinion polls yesterday showed that the extremist right-wing and Netanyahu are likely to win the upcoming elections!"

BEECROFT